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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 16 July 2018, at 9 a.m.

President: Ms. Chatardova ..... (Czechia)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Agenda item 5: High-level segment

Opening of the segment

1. **The President** declared open the high-level segment of the 2018 session of the Economic and Social Council, including the three-day ministerial meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council.

Statement by the President

2. **The President** said that although progress had been made, the world was not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Several examples reflected that progress was not sufficiently rapid. Extreme poverty had been reduced by two thirds compared to 1990, but there were more undernourished people in 2018 than in 2016. Twenty per cent of the world's population did not have access to proper sanitation, which was higher than the 12 per cent recorded in 2000. One billion people still did not have access to electricity, and renewable energy had not yet reached 20 per cent of overall usage.

3. While disaster risk reduction strategies were increasingly being designed, fewer than one hundred countries had implemented them. Close to 900 million people lived in slums and 91 per cent of the world breathed air that was below the levels of quality recommended by the World Health Organization. Material consumption was growing globally, even as national policies relating to sustainable consumption and production were developed. Serious environmental impacts had been witnessed, such as forest loss and declining productivity.

4. Despite improvements in domestic resource mobilization, there were insufficient funds to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Debt service as a proportion of exports had been rising for the previous five years in the least developed countries. Official development assistance (ODA) continued to decline. The digital divide between developed and developing countries remained worrisome, as did the reduced share in world merchandise exports held by developing regions. Although 102 countries were implementing national statistical plans, very few developing countries had fully funded such plans.

5. Overall, major disparities existed both within and between countries, with the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States lagging behind on almost all the targets. Middle-income countries also faced particular challenges, including the exclusion of large segments of the population from economic advancement. Disaggregated data was needed to reach the furthest behind.

6. However, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was being domesticated into concrete policies and measures throughout the world, with more inclusive and evidence-based approaches taking the fore. Science and technology must be continually harnessed to advance the Goals. Integrated water resources management was a solution for many challenges, as was scaled-up investment in renewable energy production. Policies were also being designed worldwide to tackle specifically urban problems, such as guaranteeing housing affordability, combating urban sprawl and ensuring access to public spaces. Many countries were implementing strategies for sustainable production and consumption, and conducting research on how to protect, restore and promote ecosystems.

7. In the face of such challenges, policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development were necessary at all levels, including with a view to strengthening global partnerships and enhancing the means of implementation. Heads of State and Government should reaffirm their support for the 2030 Agenda and empower all communities to take ownership. The implementation process must also involve the business sector and leaders in science, technology and innovation. In that regard, she welcomed the new High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation established by the Secretary-General.

8. It was encouraging that two thirds of all countries had undertaken a voluntary national review with regard to their implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A strong cross-cutting message contained in the reviews was that the 2030 Agenda did not solely involve governments, but also the business sector, civil society, academia, communities and individuals, including youth. Countries had indicated that the 2030 Agenda was widely supported at the highest levels of government and had highlighted steps taken to integrate the Agenda into their national policy frameworks.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

9. **Mr. Lajčák** (Slovakia), President of the General Assembly, said that there was no time to waste, as huge challenges lay ahead. Despite massive reductions in extreme poverty rates and the number of children forced to work, as well as the emergence of health-care innovations allowing for longer and healthier lives and a 10 per cent increase in electrical connectivity between 2000 and 2016, the international community must address a number of worrying trends.

10. The gains made, especially regarding extreme poverty, had not benefited everyone equally; many people in sub-Saharan Africa still lived in dire conditions. Moreover, many people worldwide continued to die of easily preventable and treatable diseases due to a lack of access to medical services. Although more children were enrolled in school, not all of them were receiving quality education that prepared them for a better life. One in six people still did not have access to safe drinking water; every minute, one child died from contaminated water or otherwise poor sanitation and hygiene. Gender inequality persisted, as did the digital divide. Current demands for water, food, energy and housing were already unsustainable and set to worsen, as the global population was expected to rise to almost 10 billion by 2050. Despite the fact that the planet was suffering from the effects of global warming, there was still significant pushback against efforts to fight climate change.

11. Without the global masterplan provided by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, governments would be scrambling to find national strategies, while unilateralism, protectionism and extremism would attract ever-larger numbers of people. Serious economic uncertainty and environmental catastrophes would befall the world. Thankfully, the 2030 Agenda had been designed to be universal: instead of vague ideals, it had set up concrete goals and targets, as well as a clear follow-up mechanism.

12. The 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development was gathered for the third time to review the progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; it was meeting at a time of great opportunity, given the reforms occurring throughout the United Nations system that would affect its development work on the ground. In 2018, the Forum was focused on patterns of production and consumption as well as living and working conditions. There were three areas in need of urgent attention. First, although funding was currently insufficient to achieve the Goals, being creative and proactive by going beyond traditional models and tapping into investment and capital flows would help to solve that problem. Second, a cross-pillar approach must be adopted, including through the exploration of non-traditional options for financing and partnerships, such as those involving artificial intelligence and communication technology. Third, it was necessary to prioritize inclusion. All systems — including at the United Nations — had been built by men and for men. In order to achieve the Goals, women must participate and take leadership positions; businesses, civil society and regional actors must also come to the table. Young people embodied the kind of innovative ideas needed to move forward.

13. More than half of all Member States — or 112 countries — had contributed voluntary national reviews, which was a clear sign of commitment. However, commitment was not enough: results must be seen on the ground. There was no time to waste.

Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General

14. **Ms. Mohammed** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations) said that almost three years had passed since world leaders had adopted the 2030 Agenda, a roadmap for peaceful and prosperous societies on a healthy planet. The High-level Political Forum was an annual opportunity to take stock of implementation efforts in that regard, assessing whether the world was on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and what could be done differently to achieve better results in coming years.

15. There was already evidence of progress in certain areas, such as the reduction in maternal and child mortality and expanded access to electricity, as well as efforts to address global unemployment, the rate of forest loss worldwide and child marriage. In other areas, however, momentum was too slow or actively decelerating: for the first time in a decade, the number of people who were undernourished had increased, from 777 million people in 2015 to 815 million in 2016. Poverty was becoming an increasingly urban phenomenon, with most of the world's extreme poor projected to live in urban settings by 2035. Young people were still three times more likely to be unemployed, basic sanitation was still lacking in many parts of the world and progress towards renewable energy was not rapid enough. The world was witnessing alarming declines in biodiversity, as well as rising sea levels, coastal erosion, extreme weather conditions and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases.

16. To date, sufficient resources had not been found to finance the 2030 Agenda. Many countries still did not meet their ODA commitments of 0.7 per cent of gross national income; leveraging private finance using ODA would remain a futile proposition until that trend was reversed.

17. The world had 12 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and transformation towards resilient and sustainable societies was an absolute imperative. The Goals had already had a major impact around the world: governments had adapted plans and policies, new multi-stakeholder initiatives had emerged, and local and regional actors (including from the private sector) were increasingly taking ownership. However, current efforts were not sufficient or rapid enough.

18. The repositioning of the United Nations development system brought about by recent reforms would ensure better integration and coordination of all United Nations entities and partners, reinforcing collective responsibility and transparency. Efforts to achieve the Goals must be embedded at the local, national, regional and global levels alike and go beyond merely paying lip service to the core ideals of the 2030 Agenda. Such efforts would entail realigning plans, budgets, laws, business practices and personal decisions with the principles of inclusion and sustainability as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda.

19. Although 109 countries had national policies on sustainable consumption and production, more must be done to change existing patterns of behaviour and established practices. More investments should be made in crisis prevention and resilience-building, especially for the most vulnerable countries. Partnerships with civil society, the private sector, academia and youth must be expanded. Gender equality must be placed at the forefront of all sustainability efforts. Reliable, open, timely and disaggregated data should inform future investments and actions towards the Goals.

20. The Forum should examine new approaches to and tools for the implementation of the Goals, building on lessons from the voluntary national review process. It should work urgently towards the achievement of all 17 promises so that all people could live in peace and prosperity worldwide.

Statement by the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth

21. **Ms. Wickramanayake** (Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth) said that the world currently had the largest population of young people in history — 1.8 billion — 90 per cent of whom lived in developing countries. It was critical to leverage such shifting demographics for the progress of humankind and the health of the planet; to achieve sustainable development, new generations must know and care about the global development agenda, taking ownership of it for themselves. Although youth was essential to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, young people had traditionally been treated as the beneficiaries of development policies and agendas, rather than as active agents who could shape them. In reality, young people were the sustainable development generation and in many places were already leading the charge. Young people were also the most interconnected and digitally savvy generation in history, using technology to solve problems from the favelas of Brazil to the refugee camps of Jordan. To solve pressing global issues, the international community should tap into the dynamism of young innovators, activists, entrepreneurs and advocates who had the potential to disrupt the status quo and be a force for positive change.

22. The 2018 High-level Political Forum was focused on the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies. Young people were active partners in those efforts, working to ensure universal and equitable access to clean drinking water and sanitation; making innovative energy consumption choices; increasing the eco-efficiency of consumption and minimizing waste and pollution; and advancing the New Urban Agenda aimed at making cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe and resilient.

23. In January 2018, youth representatives, activists and advocates presented their contributions related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals during the annual Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council. Policymakers had similarly shared their tactics for engaging young people and addressing their needs and priorities in national contexts. The creation of the Youth Forum in 2012 had marked a turning point in making the United Nations more accessible to young people. Given the principle of leaving no one behind, it was important to include youth in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as well as in the follow-up and review process.

24. In 2018, 47 countries had submitted their voluntary national reviews on the implementation process. While many countries had referenced youth in their reviews, more details were needed regarding efforts to ensure that the process was inclusive and youth engagement was meaningful. Best practices included allowing young people to directly contribute to their national reporting efforts — through seats in national commissions or the inclusion of independent contributions — and having youth delegates participate in official meetings at Headquarters. Even without having a formal seat at the table, young people found innovative and creative ways to participate, including through their own development work, campaigns to improve youth participation, shadow reporting, providing citizen-generated data, designing youth-led monitoring frameworks, and championing the Goals at the local level.

25. Youth contributions to the achievement of the Goals must be recognized and promoted, especially with regard to data collection. Countries should bring youth delegates to the Forum, as including young people in an official delegation added value and built intergenerational equity. By connecting with young people at the local level, youth delegates could bring a representative voice that would otherwise go unheard. The Forum must engage more broadly and more systematically with young people to

ensure that they could act as critical agents of change. Young women and girls, indigenous youth and young people living with disabilities must also be recognized as stakeholders in local and national processes. At the local level, youth representatives could participate in municipal participatory planning, budgeting and monitoring processes and establish relationships between the 2030 Agenda and the lives of young people.

26. Conversely, the international community must invest in quality, free education, universal health coverage and the empowerment of women and girls in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. However, doing so would require data disaggregated by age among other factors, lest stereotypes and over-generalizations about youth emerge. Concerted action should be taken to address the gaps in data for young people.

27. As the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, she had met young people around the world and been struck by how often they had asked what they could do to solve problems in their community and contribute to sustainable development. In fact, the desire to participate was a defining characteristic of young people. The international community must put aside its myths and preconceptions and open the door to young people in order to achieve the 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals.

Keynote address

28. **Ms. Yeoh** (United Nations Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador and actor), delivering a keynote address on the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies, said that sustainability was both an individual and a collective responsibility. Governments, the private sector and individual citizens must all participate and contribute to United Nations efforts. Although the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals provided an ambitious blueprint for governments, no change would be visible on the ground unless individuals made a conscious choice to alter their consumption patterns. However, governments could assist that shift by promoting policies that helped raise consciousness about consumption choices, and by ensuring that the transition towards sustainable development was affordable, fair, and economically viable. Businesses could likewise develop products and technologies that sped up the transformation.

29. As an actor and a Goodwill Ambassador, her job was communication. United voices could have a great impact: governments must listen when their citizens demanded change. Focusing on Goal 6, she noted that signs of water shortages were widespread. Around 700 million people worldwide suffered from water scarcity and one-third of global groundwater systems were already experiencing distress. Water availability and quality were also affected by pollution, caused by intensive agriculture, industrial production, mining and untreated urban runoff and wastewater.

30. As consumers, global citizens were not always aware that they were part of water shortage and pollution problems — but they could also be part of the solution. Individuals should be mindful of their water footprint, whether the water required to grow their food or to produce their clothes. For example, more than 10,000 litres of water were required to produce a single pair of jeans on average.

31. Bold actions were required at all levels to transition to a low-carbon economy. Energy efficiency programmes must be implemented while also investing in renewable energy sources. In fact, businesses could accelerate the transition to a sustainable energy system whilst significantly reducing their own carbon footprints and saving money. Although governments played a key role in shifting consumption patterns, citizens also had the collective power to demand climate-neutral solutions and products, and to shape a carbon- neutral economy with their purchasing choices.

32. Cities were home to over half the world's population and produced about 75 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions: urban citizens could therefore have a huge impact if they were to collectively change their habits. It was thus necessary to empower citizens to achieve Goal 12 of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. By 2030, 5.4 billion individuals would be part of the global middle class, leading to increased consumption and resource strain. In many parts of the world, overconsumption already had evident negative social and ecological repercussions.

33. The fashion industry was closely intertwined with the daily lives of ordinary citizens; overconsumption was rampant in that sector, engendering major environmental harm. The garment industry was an ideal example of a sector where both government policies and individual choices could play a huge role. A sustainable society must have consciously dressed citizens. Trees could be used to make clothes in a sustainable way, while being mindful of Goal 15 and protecting the delicate balance of the ecosystem and fighting deforestation, land degradation and biodiversity loss. A sustainable society would be possible with simple and practical solutions, but could not achieved without informed citizens, progressive businesses and supportive governments.

The meeting rose at 9.50 a.m.